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Report of the Siena Group for Social Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-second session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Siena Group for Social Statistics. The Commission may wish to review the work programme of the Group and offer advice on the direction of its future work.

* E/CN.3/2002/1.
** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 4* (E/2001/24), chap. I, sect. A.

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Report of the Siena Group for Social Statistics

Purpose

To promote and coordinate international cooperation in the areas of social statistics by focusing on social indicators, social accounting, concepts and classifications, and an analysis of the linkages and frameworks for integrating social, economic, and demographic data for the purposes of policy formulation and analysis.

Year organized

1993

Participants

Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Economic Commission for Europe, European Commission, Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Meetings and other events

1. Siena, Italy, October 1993.
2. Stockholm, June 1994.
3. Oslo, June 1995.
4. Paris, June 1996.
5. Neuchâtel, Switzerland, June 1997.
6. Sydney, December 1998.
7. Maastricht, the Netherlands, May 2000.

An international summer school on social statistics is organized by the Training Institute for European Statisticians (TES) and the Siena Group for Social Statistics in cooperation with the University of Siena, and is sponsored by the European Commission (Eurostat). The summer school programme is developed around three courses/three themes arranged over a period of three consecutive years. The first theme was "Inequality and equity" (1998), the second (1999) was "Participation, discrimination and exclusion" (approached mainly from the meso level) and the third (2000) was "Cohesion, integration and policy analysis" (approached mainly from the macro level).

Topics considered

1. National accounts, economic analysis and social statistics.
2. Social reporting and social accounting.
3. Monitoring social exclusion in education and labour markets.
4. Intergenerational relations and social mobility.
5. On the way to a multicultural society.
6. Families at the end of the twentieth century.
7. Accounting in social statistics and indicators for social development.

In the past eight years, a lot of work on these topics has been done; labour accounting has become well established as a method and is incorporated in the work plans of several national statistical institutes. Similarly, educational and health accounting, as well as time-use based satellite accounts, are at different stages of development. National accounts have been extended to data on the labour market, social protection and household production. Social accounting matrices are being further developed. Conceptual frameworks linking monetary and non-monetary phenomena are being developed and tested. Government policy is increasingly monitored objectively with regard to its effectiveness. To that end, sets of social indicators have now been developed and various countries and international organizations already use several sets of key indicators to monitor specific policy fields (e.g., employment, education, social exclusion and health). Within the European Union, a set of structural indicators is being developed to monitor the process of European economic and social reform. The Statistical Commission has been entrusted by the Economic and Social Council to coordinate a core list of indicators for use in the follow-up to the main United Nations conferences and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework-common country assessment processes at the country level. The Economic

Commission for Europe (ECE) in cooperation with UNDP, has been working on a framework for monitoring social trends and policies in transition economies.

Products

Volumes of proceedings of each meeting, containing all the papers presented and summaries of the discussions, have been issued. The Group has also published three thematic publications:

"Families at the end of the twentieth century" (1999), available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics;

"Monitoring multicultural societies: a Siena Group report"(1997), available from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office;

"A statistical portrait of youth exclusion" (1997), available from ISTAT, Centro Diffusione.

Theme of the 2000 meeting

Accounting in social statistics and indicators for social development

Rationale: the ongoing transformation of social statistics from a wide variety of isolated statistics into integrated systems (comprehensive surveys, social accounting matrices etc.) is considered to be the logical consequence of the increased need on the part of modern policy makers to monitor social and economic developments through a restricted set of authoritative indicators, based on a consistent framework of statistical information via internationally comparable statistical information (indicators) and harmonization efforts. Indicators and integration were discussed in earlier meetings of the Group as well as in the context of the Mondorf seminars. The experience with building statistical systems and developing and using indicators is not yet equally shared. A variety of international organizations have developed sets of social (key) indicators and formulated requirements for basic statistical information. In anticipation of those policy demands, some national statistical institutes have experimented with integrating surveys, others have put much effort into building accounting systems, and others have investigated the possibilities of using existing and new registers and other administrative sources. To consolidate the achieved progress and to stimulate further developments, the Maastricht meeting attempted to provide a forum to summarize and share existing experience, find new approaches and develop common strategies. The meeting was divided into five sessions as follows:

1. State of the art and its relevance to the policy agenda.
2. Why and for whom indicators are produced.
3. How we decide what to measure.
4. How data are collected and what provisions are made for consistency and comparability.
5. Linking the monetary and non-monetary phenomena that make up social accounting systems.

The conclusions of the meeting stressed the need for more structured studies and cooperation in the field of indicators and in the field of methodologies for combining data from different sources. For that purpose, subgroups have been proposed to develop cooperation projects in those fields among participants from different countries. The Group also stressed its role in training in social statistics via international summer school activities.

Forthcoming meetings

The 2001 meeting of the Group was scheduled to be organized by the Portuguese National Statistical Institute. For logistical and organizational reasons, however, that could not be realized, which forced the Chair and some core members of the Group to evaluate the direction of the activities of the Group. It was concluded that in the field, as described under topics considered, much work still has to be done in respect of preparing a handbook on statistical data integration, the implementation of micro-macro links, the concept and measurement of social capital in the context of the knowledge-based society and the development of quality assessment of social statistics. Therefore, on 3 and 4 December 2001, an intermediate meeting of the Group will be organized in Geneva, hosted by ECE. The purpose of that meeting will be to outline the strategy of the Group for the next few years and to set its strategic medium-term goals, bearing in mind the developments in the field of social statistics, as mentioned above. A strategy paper will be prepared for the meeting, based on the conclusions of the Maastricht meeting of the Group in 2000 and recent developments in social policy.

The first series of summer school programmes was successfully completed in 2000. TES has been very supportive in the organization of those schools. The structure of the lectures of the summer schools was designed along the different levels (micro, meso and macro) and domains of social statistics. As a consequence of changes in the formal relationship between Eurostat and TES, the organizational support from TES will be reconsidered. Some element of the summer school programme being directly linked to a Group meeting will be the most likely option.

The United Kingdom Office for National Statistics is considering organizing the next meeting of the Group, to be held in late spring 2002.

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The Siena Group also maintains an Internet site within the English language section of the ISTAT site at: http://www.istat.it/Primpag/siena2.htm.